

BOOK NOTICE

RICHARD B. TAYLOR. 2014. **Common Woody Plants & Cacti of South Texas**. (ISBN-13: 978-0-292-75652-6, flexbound). University of Texas Press, PO Box 7819, Austin, Texas 78713-7819, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.utexaspress.com, 1-800-252-3206). \$22.95, 152 pp., 117 color photos, illus. glossary, bib., index, 4.5" x 7.25".

This is a field guide for the identification of and critical information related to the values and uses of the 50 most common trees, shrubs, cacti, yucca, and succulents of the South Texas "brush country". It was written by a retired Texas Parks & Wildlife Department biologist. Its primary focus is wildlife, but it includes a great deal of valuable information about resource management and values for a variety of other concerns.

The book's compact size makes it an ideal reference to take along on hikes, field trips, and explorations. The 50 plants selected for inclusion in the book are the most significant of the more than 281 woody species and 32 species of cacti, yucca, and succulents found in the region. They represent more than 75% of the total tree, shrub, and cacti component of South Texas.

The book begins with a historical perspective on the social, cultural, and economic factors that have influenced the plant communities, ranching enterprises, and wildlife habits of South Texas. That is followed by a description of the history of brush management activities and efforts in recent history. Also included in the introductory section is general guidance on habitat appraisal and evaluation techniques.

The **Quick Key** for plant identification is one of the most useful keys I have seen for woody plants. Species are quickly grouped into three broad categories: (1) thorned woody plants, (2) thornless woody plants, and (3) cacti, yucca, and succulent plants. From there each broad category is further subdivided and systematically narrowed down using easily identified characteristics. For example the thorned woody plants are subdivided into two categories: (1) those with straight thorns and (2) those with curved thorns. Thornless plants are placed into subcategories based on growth form (tree-like or shrub-like). As the user progresses through the Quick Key using the recognizable characteristics to limit the possibilities, even relatively inexperienced botanists can easily narrow the list of potential species until finally the user has a positive identification, or at least a very small group of potential plants.

Following the quick key are narrative descriptions of each of the 50 plants. Species are listed by scientific name but also include one or more common names (including Spanish common names). The descriptions are well-written, easy to understand and very informative. They are accompanied by at least one, and often two or more, color photographs showing the plant in its natural habitat. The descriptions and pictures help the user verify the identity of each plant. The narrative description of each species also includes a value rating of the plant for wildlife, livestock, and other uses.

In addition to the typical information listed above, this guide also includes at the end of each narrative description the crude protein content of the leaves and/or fruits of the plant during each season of the year. This is critical information for wildlife biologists, ranch managers, landowners, and others who depend on these browse plants to provide the nutritional needs of wildlife and livestock. The information is a valuable reference source to aid in wildlife management.

Appendix I is a table showing the habitat values (food, cover, nesting, roosting, water, etc.) that the included plants provide for the following categories of wildlife: game birds, song birds, insects, small mammals, deer, and reptiles. Appendix II is a table listing the palatability and browse preference of each plant species for white-tailed deer. Plants are described as 1st choice, 2nd choice, 3rd choice, etc. Appendix III lists the percentages of crude protein, digestible protein, and digestible dry matter for each plant across the seasons. And Appendix IV is a listing of the common names and scientific names of every plant, vertebrate, and invertebrate mentioned in the book. A two-page illustrated glossary, a bibliography, and an index round out the book's end matter.

This field guide is an invaluable resource for wildlife managers, biologists, ranchers, conservationists, amateur botanists, students, and anyone else interested in the vegetation of the South Texas "brush country."—*Dan Caudle, Independent Grassland Consultant, Weatherford, Texas, U.S.A.*